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February 2021 Traffic Safety Newsletter

Older Drivers

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From the Desk of: Amanda Horton | Corporate Partner Outreach Coordinator

While some motorists can drive safely into their nineties, for others, problems with eyesight, sleep, tremors, memory loss, or other medical conditions can make driving dangerous. Getting older does not necessarily mean a person's driving days are over. However, it's important to plan ahead and take steps to ensure the safety of your loved ones on the road. Some things that older drivers don't tend to think about are factors such as the inability to perceive the speed of approaching vehicles, the effects of prescription drug usage, and other limitations with their bodies. These all affect how a person drives and are important to keep in mind when getting behind the wheel.

**Driving abilities
change as we age.**



**Learn more about
how to recognize
and discuss changes
in your older loved
one's driving. NHTSA
offers free materials
to help!**

NHTSA
www.nhtsa.gov

[Click here to learn more about Older Drivers from the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#)

Answering the following questions can help you determine if you need to have a conversation with an older driver.

- Are they getting lost on routes that should be familiar?
- Have you noticed new dents or scratches to the vehicle?
- Have they received a ticket for a driving violation?
- Have they experienced a near-miss or crash recently?
- Have they been advised to limit/stop driving due to a health reason?
- Are they overwhelmed by road signs and markings while driving?
- Are they taking any medication that might affect driving safely?
- Have they received a ticket for impaired driving?
- Have you noticed them speeding or driving too slowly for no reason?
- Are they suffering from any illnesses that may affect driving skills?

Medical Conditions in Older Drivers - DMV

In the above video produced by the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the narrator explains how certain medical conditions can affect a person's ability to safely operate a vehicle. Please feel free to watch the video to learn what some of these conditions are, and how they can impair a person's driving.

Is there a recommended or required age to stop driving?

No- It is the responsibility of the driver to know when they could be putting themselves or other motorists in danger. It is important to talk with family members to come up with a plan in case there comes a time when driving is no longer possible. Everyone's body is different. While one person may be able to drive safely into their 90's, another person may face other physical or mental challenges that require them to stop driving sooner.

Learn More About a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist

Due to the aging process, older drivers can be at a higher risk for motor vehicle crashes. Physical and mental changes associated with aging can contribute to a higher crash rate for this age group. In-office and off-road driving assessments are the primary means by which these older adults are assessed for driving readiness.

Tracy Dissinger has been a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist (CDRS) since 1999. A CDRS is a healthcare professional who plans, develops, and implements driving services for individuals with disabilities. Ms. Dissinger was introduced to driving rehabilitation during her first position at Milford Memorial Hospital, which is now Bayhealth Hospital Sussex Campus.

As a licensed and certified Occupational Therapist, Ms. Dissinger considers driving to be more than just a necessity or a means to community mobility. For many individuals, driving is a meaningful activity that provides them employment opportunities, the ability to manage their own health, and most

importantly driving provides them the ability to see family, friends, and loved ones. She has treated individuals across the lifespan for driving rehabilitation, including teenagers with special needs and young adults with mobility concerns. However, the majority of individuals who need driving rehabilitation are older adults.

Primary diagnoses include age-related conditions affecting the visual system such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. These conditions create issues and challenges such as increased sensitivity to light which makes driving at night difficult. This may also lead to decreased visual acuity needed for driving reaction time. Age-related declines can also result in cognitive declines that affect procedural memory, which is the memory associated with how we do certain tasks such as driving.



Pictured above is Tracy Dissinger (far right) and her staff at Occupational Therapy of Delaware.

As a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist, Tracy Dissinger conducts an off-road clinical assessment to determine if an individual is clinically appropriate and safe to progress to a behind-the-wheel road test. For this individualized assessment, Ms. Dissinger determines each client's visual abilities, cognitive abilities, and physical abilities needed for driving. This is done through standardized assessments, client-centered discussion, and skilled observation. An individual's visual system includes visual fields, visual acuity, visual attention, visual perception, and visual discrimination. These skills can all be assessed during the off-road driving evaluation if needed.

Cognitive skills include attention, awareness, processing speed, and executive functioning. These skills are necessary for safe driving and may be assessed

by the CDRS as well. Physical skills such as standing posture, seated posture, ambulation, and vehicle transferability may be assessed during the off-road assessment. If a client is appropriate and safe for a road test, Ms. Dissinger will refer them to a Certified Driving Evaluator in Kent, Sussex, or New Castle Counties.

An important part of Tracy's work as a CDRS is to determine when an individual is not appropriate for a road test. Individuals with certain progressive neurological conditions and cognitive challenges associated with Alzheimer's disease, dementia, multiple sclerosis, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis may not be appropriate for the on-road driving evaluation. Ms. Dissinger connects these individuals to organizations that can support community mobility such as DART, which offers a reduced fare program for older drivers. Additionally, rideshare programs across the state and county-specific transportation agencies can decrease clients' reliance on caregivers for transportation and improve the client's independence in safe community mobility.

In-person off-road driving assessments are offered monthly by Ms. Dissinger at her private practice, Occupational Therapy of Delaware, which is located in Milford, Delaware.

No matter the challenge an individual faces, safe community mobility and driving may be possible with the proper support and the right environment. If you or a loved one are in need of driving rehabilitation, more information about the services offered by Tracy Dissinger is available at www.otdelaware.com.



In the United States alone, 6,907 people ages 65 and older were killed in traffic crashes in 2018.

Driving Rehabilitation Services



The above video from the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) talks about and shows the process that a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist takes to work with and evaluate Older Drivers.

Decisions about your ability to drive should never be based on age alone. As mentioned above, many different factors that come with aging may affect a person's driving abilities. When an older driver finds themselves struggling with new body impairments, it's important to take the necessary precautions to protect everyone traveling on the road. Having a conversation with your doctor can help to determine if it may be a problem to continue driving. You should also speak with your doctor or pharmacist to determine if any medications you take may impair your ability to drive.

The Delaware Office of Highway Safety would like to extend our gratitude and thanks to Tracy Dissinger and her staff at Occupational Therapy of Delaware for their contributions to this month's newsletter!

The monthly mailing of posters and flyers is currently suspended due to COVID-19. If you or your organization needs to request something specific, please contact our office.

Be on the lookout for upcoming campaigns!

March 2021 – Impaired Driving

For more information and tools, please visit arrivealivede.com or call our office at (302) 744.2740.

Please continue to share our safety messaging on your social media platforms and email Amanda.Horton@Delaware.Gov with any updated information about your organization. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram at @HighwaySafetyDE. Thank you!

